

# LEATHER WORK

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As a decorative medium, leather has great possibilities. It is easily handled and the very few tools which are required can be obtained at little expense.

To take lessons from a competent instructor is essential, and the Bureau is prepared to supply information as to where instruction may be obtained. Reliable text books will be of assistance to the student and these may be borrowed from our lending library for a nominal fee. Leather workers should also make a point of inspecting the best specimens of their craft in the museums, and those who are within reach of the Victoria and Albert Museum will find there examples of both old and new work showing the highest standard of craftsmanship and design.

The general standard of leather work to-day is regrettably low, and generally shows an absence of understanding of the material or of any sense of the practical and useful purpose to which it can be put. Unfortunately, most craftsmen appear to regard the application of ornament to leather as their sole object, whereas it is probably true that in the majority of cases the so-called "ornament" tends to diminish rather than to raise the value of the article. This fault is not peculiar to leather workers, and if the individual craftsman's claim to useful service is to be justified he must first show that he supplies a need in a manner at least as efficient as the factory, with that something more which only the hand of the craftsman can supply. The high standard of technical excellence and utility value shown in the better class trade productions must be rivalled, and the belief in the æsthetic value of green dragons, blue birds and pink cherries, must be dropped if leather, one of the most beautiful of natural materials, is to be used in ways other than pandering to passing crazes.

It is true that this over-ornamented class of work has commanded a ready sale for some years past, but the rising standard of public taste no longer demands it, and we strongly urge all leather workers to regard the technique of their craft primarily as a practical problem. Ornament when it arises spontaneously is likely to have significance, and when it lacks this it is apt, except in the hands of the superlative craftsman, to appear rather as a blemish, whereas a plain article well made, of good proportion and serving a useful purpose, supplies a real need and justifies the craftsman.

## EQUIPMENT FOR TOOLED LEATHER WORK.

The following equipment will meet the needs of the beginner in any of the classes of decorative leather work described below, except poker work, which requires rather special and more expensive apparatus, particulars of which can be obtained by those interested, on application to the Bureau.

	s.	d.	
1 incising knife .....	1	0	approximate prices 1929
1 tracing tool .....	1	0	
1 modelling tool (double ended, .. fine and broad).....	1	0	
1 or 2 punches .....	1	6	
1 ruler .....	1	6	
1 mallet and hammer .....	1	6	
1 sponge .....	0	6	
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	7	6	

As the worker gains experience, the equipment may be added to in order to achieve more elaborate work.

## ARTICLES TO MAKE.

A few of the articles that can be made and decorated by any of the following methods are :

Handbags.	Music cases.
Portfolios.	Purses.
Blotters.	Pen wipers.
Calendars.	Writing pads and cases.
Book covers.	Card cases.
Comb cases.	Belts.
Photo frames.	Book-markers, etc., etc.
Screens.	

A loan collection of leather work, comprising various articles in different leathers and illustrating thonging, handsewn work, tooling, modelling, staining, etc., may be had from Dryad Handicrafts, 42, St. Nicholas Street, Leicester, for a short period at a charge of a few shillings.

## MATERIALS.

For tooled leather work, the beginner should practice on a piece of common basil or sheepskin before using any of the more expensive leathers ; in this way, if the leather is spoilt, little expense will be incurred. This material, however, suffers from the disadvantage that it is too soft to retain the pattern very well, and will not show up any staining to the best advantage on account of its relatively dark colour. Natural calf skin is best for ordinary modelling, and Russian calf or cowhide for heavier work.

## BLIND TOOLING.

Leather workers would be well advised to make a special study of this method of decorating leather, which leaves the natural



beauty of the material undisguised and unmarred by the application of crude colours and inappropriate "ornament." Usually the basis of the pattern is a purely formalised arrangement of lines, which just break the monotony of a plain surface. Interest is added by the means of punches, each of which forms a unit which by ingenious adaptation may be utilised in the formation of a variety of patterns. These punches may be bought ready for use, or the craftsman may design his own and have them cut at a moderate cost.

The design is first prepared on a sheet of paper and clipped to the leather, as explained in the paragraph on "Modelled Leather" below. The tools are then heated in a gas flame to the correct temperature, determined by experimenting on a piece of waste leather, upon which the pressure of the tool should leave a clear impression without scorching. The design is transferred by pressing the heated tool on the lines of the paper design. The paper should then be removed and the design retraced, this time directly on the leather. For finishing, the leather may be polished with a soft rag or lightly varnished after first applying starch size.

The designs or patterns are evolved from the geometrical or other forms embodied in the ends of the punches employed. A large variety of impressions is obtainable.

#### GOLD TOOLING.

This is a process similar to blind tooling up to the point of finishing the tooling. The leather is subsequently washed all over with the size—isinglass or gelatine dissolved in hot water—and when nearly dry, the impressions to be gilded are carefully painted with gold size. When the size has become tacky, the gold leaf is laid carefully over the design and pressed firmly into the impressions, which are then gone over again with heated tools. The tools must be clean and polished, and the correct heat determined by experience (*see paragraph on "Blind Tooling"*).

#### LOW RELIEF OR MODELLED LEATHER.

The design is first prepared on a sheet of paper and transferred to the leather by means of a tracing tool, the leather having been previously damped with a sponge and the tracing securely fixed to prevent any movement during the operation. It is a good plan to clip the leather to a drawing board while tracing the design.

The skin is then laid flat on a slab of smooth, hard-faced material such as glass, marble or slate, and with a steel modelling tool the outline is emphasised and the background well worked down with the Dresden tool and steel modelling tools until the desired relief is obtained. This process is called flat modelling or low relief.

#### REPOUSSÉ OR EMBOSSING.

In this method the relief is more pronounced than in modelled

work, and different tools are required to produce this effect. The work is rather more difficult than low relief modelling. The design is traced as in flat modelling, and the leather pressed up from the back by laying it on a soft material such as clay or modelling wax, or, if bolder work is required, the use of a rounded punch or the boss on a repoussé hammer is necessary. To maintain this relief, a stiff rye paste mixed with fine sawdust, or cotton wool steeped in paste, is inserted in the impression from the back.

The background may now be stamped with matting punches, which renders the pattern still more distinct. The design may also be stained or coloured to give additional interest.

#### INCISED LEATHER WORK.

The outline of the pattern is incised with a very sharp knife, cutting about half-way through the leather, which should be fairly stout material, such as cowhide. Care must be taken not to cut too deep. The cut is then opened out with a modelling tool and the pattern modelled as before.

#### CUT OR PIERCED LEATHER WORK.

This is the most effective when two kinds of leather, preferably of different colour, are combined. The pattern is lightly traced, as in modelled work, and the parts of the leather through which the background leather is to show are cut out, using a very sharp pointed knife. The background leather is then pasted to the pierced design.

#### APPLIQUÉ WORK.

This is a similar type of decoration to pierced leather work. Designs are cut out in leather of a different colour or texture from the background, the edges pared, and the design then pasted on to the skin forming the background.

Simple decorative forms, such as monograms, are the most suitable. If the edges are tooled it is difficult to detect the join.

#### INLAY WORK.

Inlay work is difficult and requires a good deal of skill to execute. As its name implies, the design is cut out in the solid in one piece of leather and then inlaid in the piece forming the ground work.

#### SUÈDE OR SOFT LEATHER WORK.

This work is simple and easy to learn, and has the further advantage of requiring the minimum of tools. Such articles as wallets, cushion covers, hand bags, book covers, tea cosies, note cases, etc., can be made without difficulty, but more skill and a knowledge of cutting out will be required if articles of wearing apparel, such as jumpers, slippers, moccasins, hats, gloves, etc., are undertaken.

The following equipment will enable work varying from simple character to the more elaborate, including thonging and lacing, to be done :—

<i>Equipment for Suède leather work.</i>		s.	d.	approximate prices, 1929
1 sixway punch .....		2	0	
1 knife .....		1	0	
1 brass rule .....		1	0	
1 press stud tool .....		1	6	
1 thonging tool .....		1	0	
1 stitch spacer .....		1	3	
1 mallet .....		1	0	
1 pair of scissors .....		2	0	
		<hr/>		
		10	9	

### *Materials.*

Suède leather work requires soft skins, such as velvet, Persian, or good quality suède, for making hats, bags and articles of wearing apparel. For gloves, chamois, white doe, velvet suède, antelope, French kid and tan cape may be used.

Glove patterns may be bought with full instructions for use from 6d. to 1/0. Another method is to take to pieces an old but well-fitting glove, iron it out and use it as a pattern.

Moccasins may be lined with sheep woolskins or unclipped rabbit skins.

### *Approximate current prices of materials (1929) for tooled and soft leather work :—*

Natural calf skins .....	2/9 to 3/- per sq. ft.
Cowhide .....	2/- to 2/6 „ „ „
Basil or sheepskin .....	1/3 to 1/6 „ „ „
Goat skin .....	1/3 to 1/9 „ „ „
Velvet, Persians or suèdes.....	1/3 to 1/6 „ „ „
French kid.....	1/- to 1/9 „ „ „
Tan cape .....	1/9 to 2/- „ „ „
Chamois .....	4/- to 10/6 per skin
White doe .....	5/9 to 12/6 „ „
	according to size.
Sheep woolskin .....	2/- to 2/3 per sq. ft.
Rabbit skins .....	1/9 to 4/- each
Skivers for lining .....	9d. to 1/- per sq. ft.
Glove patterns .....	6d. to 1/- each
Press studs .....	9d. to 1/- per doz.
	assorted colours.
Spirit & water stains .....	from 6d. per bottle
Adhesive .....	from 6d. per tube.
Ruskin pottery for mounting ....	6d. 8d. 10d. & 1/- each
	according to size.

The above prices generally refer to quotations on whole skins, and owing to fluctuations, must be regarded only as approximately correct.



The best material should be used. Small skins are the best, and it will be generally cheaper in the long run to pay a little extra for selected skins rather than take inferior ones.

#### USEFUL BOOKS.

The following books will be found useful for reference. They deal fully with the various processes which have been briefly described in these notes :—

*Leather Work*, “ Best Way ” Series, No. 115 ; published by Fashions for All Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Price 6d.

\**Leather Work*, by Adelaide Mickel ; obtainable from B. T. Batsford Ltd., 94, High Holborn, London, W. C.1. Price 4/6.

\**Embroidered and Laced Leather Work*, by Ann Macbeth ; published by Methuen & Co., Ltd., 36, Essex Street London, W.C.2.

\**Designs in Leather Work with Working Patterns*, by F. H. Reid ; published by B. T. Batsford, Ltd. Price 2/6.

\**Leathers, Skins and Tools for Artistic Leather Work*, published by George & Co., 21a, Noel Street, Berwick Street, Soho, London, W.1. Price 1/-.

\**Leather Work*, by C. G. Leland ; published by Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 39, Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.2. Price 5/-.

\**Glove Making*, by Isabel M. Edwards ; published by G. W. Russell & Sons, Hitchin. Price 1/3.

*Guide to Glove Making at Home*, by C. M. E. Balfour ; published by B. W. Leather Co., Grayshott, Hants. Price 3d.

*Glove Making at Home*, by Mrs. Staite, 926, Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham. Price 3/-.

\**The Manufacture of Fancy Leather Goods*, by J. T. Luckock ; published by the Anglo-American Technical Co., Ltd., Price 10/-.

\**Decorative Leather Work*, by D. P. Wylie ; published by Longman's, Green & Co., 39, Paternoster Row, London, E.C. 4. Price 7/6.

\**Leather Work with Suède and other soft Leathers*, by E. Mochrie ; published by Dryad Handicrafts, 42, St. Nicholas Street, Leicester. Price 4/6.

\**Leather Craft*, by G. J. Shaw ; published by Dryad Handicrafts. Price 4/-.

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\*These books are obtainable on loan from the Bureau's Library. Terms and particulars may be had on application to the Director, Rural Industries Bureau, 27, Bedford Square, London, W.C. 1.

## SUPPLIERS OF EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS.

The materials and equipment required for decorated leather work are obtainable from the following firms. It is probable that there are many other sources of suitable and satisfactory supply, and the Bureau would be glad to receive particulars in order to supplement its own information :—

### *Modelling Tools.*

- G. Boorer, 23, Croydon Road, Reigate, Surrey.  
 Calipe Dettmer, Ltd., 21 & 22, Poland Street, London, W.1.  
 Mr. A. H. Crampton, Handicraft House, 26, Eccleston Street, London, S.W.1.  
 Dryad Handicrafts, St. Nicholas Street, Leicester, and 17, Duke Street, Manchester Square, London, W.1.  
 Francis Lewis Studio, 18, Soho Square, Oxford Street, London, W.1.  
 Gawthorp & Sons, Ltd., 96-98, High Road, East Finchley, London, N.2.  
 George & Co., 21a, Noel Street, Berwick Street, Soho, London, W.1.  
 Hampson, Bettridge & Co., 2 & 4, Fann Street, Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.1.  
 Hylder Leather Co., 72, Oxford Street, London, W.1.  
 Holtzapffel & Co., 53, Haymarket, London, S.W.1.  
 Robt. Kelly & Sons, Ltd., 28-32, Renshaw Street, Liverpool.  
 The Manual Training Tool Co., Brookhill, Sheffield.  
 Mawson, Swan & Morgan Ltd., Handicrafts House, Newcastle-on-Tyne.  
 W. Parks, Terminus House, Cornfield Road, Eastbourne.  
 The Perart Cane Works, Ltd., Cyprus Road, Leicester.  
 Plucknett & Co., Ltd., 30-38, Poland Street, London, W.1.  
 G. W. Russell & Sons, Ltd., Hitchin, Herts.  
 Sisson & Parker, Wheeler Gate, Nottingham.

And from most high-class ironmongers and edge-tool dealers.

### *Leather.*

- Art Leather Workers' Supply Co., 9, Amber Street, Shudehill, Manchester.  
 G. Boorer, 23, Croydon Road, Reigate, Surrey.  
 Craft Leather Supplies, Ltd., 9, Edmund Place, London, E.C.1.  
 Mr. A. H. Crampton, Handicraft House, 26, Eccleston Street, London, S.W.1.  
 Dryad Handicrafts, St. Nicholas Street, Leicester, and 17, Duke Street, Manchester Square, London, W.1.  
 Francis Lewis Studio, 18, Soho Square, London, W.1.  
 George & Co., 21a, Noel Street, Berwick Street, Soho, London, W.1.  
 Hylder Leather Co., 72, Oxford Street, London, W.1.  
 Manual Training Tool Co., Brookhill, Sheffield.  
 Mawson, Swan & Morgan, Handicrafts House, Newcastle-on-Tyne.  
 Douglas McRae, 158, Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.  
 W. Parks, Cornfield Road, Eastbourne.

The Perart Caneworks, Ltd., Cyprus Road, Leicester.  
Russell & Co., Hitchin, Herts.

*Glove Patterns.*

Mrs. C. M. E. Balfour, 1, Crossways Road, Grayshott, Hants.  
Mr. A. H. Crampton, Handicraft House, 26, Eccleston Street,  
London, S.W. 1.  
Dryad Handicrafts, Leicester, and 17, Duke Street, Manchester  
Square, London, W. 1.  
George & Co., 21a, Noel Street, Berwick Street, Soho, London,  
W. 1.  
Manual Training Tool Co., Ltd., Brookhill, Sheffield.  
The Perart Caneworks, Ltd., Cyprus Road, Leicester (Leach's  
and Weldon's).  
Mrs. Staite, 962, Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

*Sundry Materials :* Press Studs and Buttons, Stains, Gold Leaf,  
etc.

Calipe Dettmer & Co., Ltd., 21 & 22, Poland Street, London,  
W.1.  
Mr. A. H. Crampton, Handicraft House, 26, Eccleston Street,  
London, S.W.1.  
Dryad Handicrafts, 42, St. Nicholas Street, Leicester, and  
17, Duke Street, Manchester Square, London, W. 1.  
George & Co., 21a, Noel Street, Berwick Street, Soho, London,  
W.1.  
The Manual Training Tool Co., Ltd., Brookhill, Sheffield.  
W. Parks, Cornfield Road, Eastbourne.  
The Perart Caneworks Ltd., Cyprus Road, Leicester.  
C. J. Plucknett & Co., Ltd., 30-38, Poland Street, London,  
W.1.

*Ruskin Stones and Pottery.*

Calipe Dettmer, Ltd., 21 & 22, Poland Street, London, W.1.  
Dryad Handicrafts, Leicester, and 17, Duke Street, Manchester  
Square, London, W.1.  
Manual Training Tool Co., Ltd., Brookhill, Sheffield.  
Plucknett & Co., Ltd., 30-38, Poland Street, London, W. 1.  
W. H. Taylor, Ruskin Pottery, West Smethwick, Birmingham.

*Bag Frames, Purses, Clasps, Fittings, etc.*

G. Boorer, 23, Croydon Road, Reigate, Surrey.  
Calipe Dettmer & Co., Ltd., 21 & 22, Poland Street, London,  
W.1.  
J. W. King, Lapidary Co., Ltd., 1, Albermarl Street, London,  
E.C.1.  
Plucknett & Co., Ltd., 30-38, Poland Street, London, W.1.  
Hill & Cozens, Ltd., 123-125, Old Street, London, E.C. 1.

When communicating with the above firms, it is desirable to  
mention the Rural Industries Bureau.

